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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter dated 8 July 2011 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to refer to General Assembly resolution 60/124, by which the Assembly established the Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund to advise me on the use and impact of the Fund. In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 21 of the resolution, I have the honour to transmit herewith a note on the meeting of the Advisory Group held in Nairobi from 27 to 29 April 2011 (see annex).

As summarized in the note, the Advisory Group recognized continuing improvements in the performance and management of the Fund. The Advisory Group noted the significance of the General Assembly-mandated five-year evaluation and stressed the importance of having a final report that was well grounded in the data collected through country studies and other research. Further, the Advisory Group reviewed the efforts of the secretariat of the Fund to identify possible options for the loan facility and requested the secretariat to provide options on how to reduce the balance of the loan facility. The secretariat was also requested to integrate the recommendations and conclusions resulting from the country reviews conducted into the performance and accountability framework and to report back on the cost of producing print and video public service announcements for the Fund.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

11-41911 (E) 210711

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Annex

Note to the Secretary-General on the meeting of the Central Emergency Response Fund Advisory Group (27 to 29 April 2011)

Recommendations and conclusions

1. The Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund was established by the General Assembly by its resolution 60/124 to advise the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, on the use and impact of the Fund. The Advisory Group's first meeting for 2011 was held in Nairobi on 27 and 28 April. On 29 April, the Advisory Group conducted a field trip to Kakuma refugee camp to see first-hand the impact of financing from the Fund on humanitarian emergencies in Kenya. A total of 14 members were present at the meeting, and 12 participated in the field visit. The Chair of the Advisory Group, Ms. Yoka Brandt (Netherlands), presided over the meeting.

2. The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs provided an update on the use and management of the Fund since the Advisory Group's previous meeting, in November 2010. She presented the results of a review of the loan facility of the Fund and an analysis of the use of the Fund in protracted crises. In addition, the Group discussed the preliminary findings of the five-year evaluation of the Fund, reviewed progress on the implementation of the performance and accountability framework, discussed a number of policy issues and held in-depth discussions with the Somalia and Kenya humanitarian country teams on their use of the Fund.

Management

3. The Advisory Group thanked the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the secretariat of the Fund for their continued professional management of the Fund and noted the work to improve accountability and transparency while efficiently and effectively meeting the mandated purpose of the Fund.

4. At the previous meeting of the Advisory Group, in November 2010, the Group had discussed the Fund's $50 million loan facility, the assets of which stood at over $75 million, having accrued interest of some $25 million, and had asked the secretariat of the Fund to provide a review of the use of the loan facility for this meeting of the Group. Following a discussion of the review, the Group recommended a decrease in the size of the loan element, but agreed that more analysis and discussion would be needed before this recommendation could be implemented. In particular, the relevant findings of the five-year evaluation would need to be considered. The secretariat will provide an update on the loan facility at the next Advisory Group meeting, including options for decreasing the size of the loan facility.

5. The Advisory Group noted that, while considerable improvements had been made in monitoring and reporting on the use of the Fund, it would be important to gather further data on beneficiaries. The Group requested that the secretariat explore ways to better record and report on beneficiary data, with the understanding that this

should be kept simple and build on the data collected by United Nations implementing agencies.

6. The Advisory Group also noted the fall in allocations to the food sector, and requested the secretariat to provide some analysis on that issue.

7. The secretariat presented some initial analysis of the speed at which Fund grants were passed by United Nations agencies to non-governmental organization implementing partners. The Advisory Group asked the secretariat to undertake further research on that issue, and to make sure that it was well covered through the ongoing performance and accountability framework country reviews.

8. Concerning the question of programme support costs, the Advisory Group has asked the United Nations Controller to enable it to gain a better understanding of the use of such costs by the United Nations, outside the funds allotted to cover the costs of the secretariat.

Five-year evaluation

9. The Advisory Group reviewed the initial draft report on the five-year evaluation of the Fund and received a presentation on the progress of the evaluation from the leader of the evaluation team. The Group recognized the importance of the General Assembly-mandated five-year evaluation for donors and for the future management of the Fund. The Group stressed the importance of having a final report that was well grounded in the data collected through the country studies and other research. In this regard, the performance of the Fund should be measured against the original objectives set for it. In their comments, Advisory Group members also provided advice on the structure of the report and overall presentation of findings. The Group asked to be kept abreast of progress on the report, and intended to review and comment on the next draft of the report, which was due in mid-May 2011.

Performance and accountability

10. The Advisory Group welcomed the findings and recommendations of the independent reviews of the value added by the Fund in Chad, Mauritania and Sri Lanka. It concluded that these country reviews were providing useful reporting on the impact of the Fund at the field level. The Group requested that the relevant recommendations from the country reviews be reflected in the management response matrix for the five-year evaluation.

11. The Advisory Group took note of the main findings of the reviews undertaken to date and looked forward to receiving the next four country-level reviews over the next few months. The Group asked that further discussion on some of the findings be conducted at its next meeting. The Group agreed that the issue of the application of the life-saving criteria and the timeliness of the disbursement of funds from United Nations agencies to implementing non-governmental organization partners should remain on the agenda. On the issue of disaster preparedness funding, the Group decided that it would have a conceptual discussion at its next meeting. In addition, the issue would be revisited in the context of the five-year evaluation.

Discussions with the Kenya and Somalia humanitarian country teams

12. The Advisory Group welcomed the comprehensive presentations of the humanitarian country teams for Kenya and Somalia, which presented in-depth views

of the particular challenges that they were facing and the ways in which the Fund had been helpful in meeting those challenges. The presentations noted that the Fund had been useful in bridging critical funding gaps, had contributed to improved coordination; was fast, flexible and predictable; and had helped to leverage more funding. The presentations also identified areas for improvement: faster disbursement of funds; further clarification on the life-saving criteria; more flexibility in funding protection; increased predictability with regard to underfunded allocations; and possibilities for funding preparedness and development activities that naturally flowed from humanitarian activities. The Group noted that the five-year evaluation should provide some concrete recommendations on those issues.

13. The Advisory Group carried out a field visit to Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya on 29 April, accompanied by the United Nations Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Aeneas Chuma, and other members of the Kenya humanitarian partnership team. The Group was able to witness first-hand the impact of projects financed by the Fund and to speak with beneficiaries, implementing agencies, non-governmental organizations and partners from the Government of Kenya. It was agreed that the field visit provided the Group with insight into activities financed by the Fund that would help to better inform members on matters related to Fund management.

14. Given the usefulness of the humanitarian country team presentations and the field visit, the Advisory Group requested that, wherever possible, future meetings of the Group include the participation of field colleagues involved in implementing projects financed by the Fund. The Group recognized that, given cost and logistical factors, most meetings would need to be held in either New York or Geneva. Therefore, alternatives for ensuring the participation of colleagues from the field would be explored by the secretariat.

Challenges and opportunities in mobilizing resources

15. At the November 2010 Advisory Group meeting, the Group had recommended that the Fund's profile should be raised in order to mobilize more funds. Following further discussion during this meeting, the Group had requested that the secretariat review the cost associated with producing and distributing a new public service announcement similar to the one used following the humanitarian disasters in Haiti and Pakistan in 2010. During 2010, the Fund had received a tenfold increase in private donations, owing in part to the response to the public service announcements. The secretariat will report back to the Group in October 2011 on the cost of print advertising and video public service announcements.

Administrative matters

16. During the April 2011 meeting, the members of the Advisory Group selected a new Chair and Vice-Chair. Mr. Mikael Lindvall (Sweden) would serve as Chair, and Mr. Silvano Langa (Mozambique) would serve as Vice-Chair. The Group expressed its thanks to Ms. Brandt for her work as Chair over the past two years, and also to the other board members who were completing their terms. The Group noted that a number of those who were leaving were women, and requested that the Secretary-General pay particular attention to maintaining a good gender balance when appointing new members of the Group.

17. The Advisory Group requested the secretariat to continue to use the performance and accountability framework and diligently maintain timely and effective management of the Fund while adhering to agreed principles of accountability and transparency. Further, the secretariat was requested to provide an update on the loan facility and recommendations on how to decrease the balance of the loan facility; improve reporting on beneficiary numbers; facilitate the Group's review and comments on the five-year evaluation; follow up on the recommendations and conclusions of the country reviews as part of the performance and accountability framework; determine how field colleagues would participate in future Advisory Group meetings; and report back on the cost of producing print and video public service announcements for the Fund.

18. The next meeting of the Advisory Group will be held in New York in November 2011. During the meeting, the Group will discuss the five-year evaluation, the country reviews undertaken as part of the performance and accountability framework, the loan facility, the Fund life-saving criteria, partnerships, the food crisis and funding for preparedness, and will follow up on administrative issues.